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Student makes \$1 million selling pixels as ad space

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Look what Alex Tew did, and you get one of those "Why didn't I think of that?" flashes. It's so simple, so cheap, so mind-bogglingly lucrative that it took the 21-year-old student from small-town Wiltshire, England, not even five months to go from broke to millionaire.

Worried about paying his college tuition last August, Tew chanced upon one of those rare original moneymaking ideas.

How about creating an Internet Web page out of 1 million blank pixels? And then selling those pinhead-size digital picture elements that make up a computer screen for a dollar apiece, or \$100 per 10-by-10-pixel block, to advertisers who turn them into colorful tiny billboards and micro logos linked to their own Web sites?

And why not call this new marketing monstrosity "The Million Dollar Homepage" - since Tew stood to make a million bucks?

At 1:42:28 p.m. EST today, Tew can post a "sold out" sign on the Million Dollar Homepage. You can see it at www.milliondollarhomepage.com.

The spiky-haired Brit put the last thousand pixels up for auction on eBay 10 days ago with a \$1 starting bid for the lot. With 24 hours to go, Tuesday's bidding reached \$152,300, putting him over the million-dollar mark.

"I'm half-expecting a last-minute flurry of bids. I think it is going to go higher," said Tew, whose initial investment to set up the pixel page was less than \$100. "I never imagined things would get to the level that they have."

Unsure initially that a single pixel would sell, Tew felt the idea had potential, so he aimed high. "I asked myself the question, 'How could I become a millionaire?' Twenty minutes later I had the answer," he said. In the beginning, he reasoned, even 1 percent or 2 percent of a million dollars wouldn't be bad.

The phenomenon he created has been hailed by some as a genre-changing concept in online marketing, otherwise an advertising badlands of spam, banner ads and pop-ups. Others say it's a brilliant, one-time marketing aberration that will never be replicated.

Whatever it is, the Million Dollar Homepage isn't a pretty site, even as it nears completion and begins a guaranteed minimum five-year lifespan. Tew calls this head-cocking creation "a big collage of different colored ads."

It looks like a bulletin board on designer steroids, an advertising train wreck you can't not look at. It's like getting every pop-up ad you ever got in your life, at once. It's the Internet equivalent of suddenly feeling like you want to take a shower.

But its conceptual beauty is that it's not designed at all. How the pieces fit together is totally random. Buyers create little ads and choose open ad space on a 10,000-block grid.

The page contains more than 2,000 advertisements, with dimensions ranging from postage-stamp size to a Tart N' Tiny candy (sorry, we couldn't think of anything else small enough to compare!), displaying words normally red-flagged by spam filters: EZ Money! Hair loss? Poker! Loans! Get Girls! Freebies! Cancer Cure! Casino!

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